

**STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER K. JARVI, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL
RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 1483, TO AMEND THE OMNIBUS PARKS AND
PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT ACT OF 1996 TO EXTEND THE AUTHORIZATION
FOR CERTAIN NATIONAL HERITAGE AREAS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

May 15, 2007

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 1483, a bill to amend the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996 to extend the authorization for certain national heritage areas.

H.R. 1483 has four main provisions. Section 1(a) would extend the authorization for federal funding for nine national heritage areas, designated in 1996, by an additional 15 years and \$10 million each. Section 1(b) would make several technical corrections to the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor including a name change for the area and the deauthorization of the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor Committee, whose duties have already been assumed by a non-profit management entity. Section 1(c) would make several technical corrections to the National Coal Heritage Area and authorize the transition of the management entity to a new public entity, the National Coal Heritage Area Authority. Finally, section 1(e) would add Berkeley County to the South Carolina Heritage Area.

The Department opposes section 1(a) that extends the authorization for federal funding for the nine national heritage areas. The Department supports the rest of the provisions of H.R. 1483 with some technical corrections described in our testimony.

Less than a year ago, there were 27 heritage areas. Today, there are 37. Our understanding is that national heritage areas are locally driven grassroots efforts to preserve resources that were intended to operate independent of federal funding at the end of the authorization period. While the National Park Service would continue to support the heritage areas through technical assistance, the heritage areas were to be largely self-sufficient after an initial period of financial assistance from NPS. This was the understanding, particularly for those heritage areas created in 1996 and the more recently designated heritage areas.

H.R. 1483 would increase the authorization ceiling for appropriations to each area from \$10,000,000 to \$20,000,000 and extend the termination date of the Secretary of the Interior's financial commitment from September 30, 2012 to September 30, 2027. These provisions are inconsistent with the national heritage area program legislation passed by the Senate last year and supported by the Administration. In addition, the extensions for each of the nine national heritage areas provided for in the bill would seem to be premature since each of these areas has an additional five years left of their authorization to receive federal funding.

Since being designated, these nine national heritage areas have proven to be very successful in accomplishing partnership projects and leveraging funding. For example, the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor has developed an innovative regional approach to tourism to help

visitors navigate the historic, cultural and scenic resources of the region through a network of visitor centers, interpretive sites and travel guides. Known as the “Corridor Discovery System” this strategy implements one of the goals of the heritage corridor’s management plan to use the region’s heritage as a tool to promote rural economic development. The partners include members of local communities and heritage businesses, local and regional tourism boards, local governments, and the state of South Carolina who provided bond funding to construct three discovery centers and fund annual operational costs. Grants of \$1.8 million from the heritage area have leveraged over \$30 million in public and private funds for site enhancements.

In the Ohio and Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor, the management entity has worked with more than 90 partners to develop a 101-mile towpath trail that runs through 42 communities, four counties and Cuyahoga Valley National Park. The trail attracts people to walk, hike and bike, and has also attracted corporate sponsors interested in supporting healthier lifestyles and quality-of-life amenities. Funding from the National Park Service has leveraged \$14.5 million in other federal funds, \$14.5 million in local government funding, and \$10.4 million from private investment.

The Essex National Heritage Area, which commemorates 400 years of maritime history and tradition, works in close partnership with Salem Maritime National Historic Site. Joint initiatives include a visitor center in historic downtown Salem that orients tourists and residents to the region’s history and educational outreach programs, and the construction of a full-rigged merchant sailing ship *Friendship of Salem*. Together, the heritage area and the national historic site link the heritage stories of the region and have leveraged significant money and goodwill.

In order for these nine national heritage areas to prepare for the cessation of the authorization of federal funding in 2012, the Department would recommend that the bill be amended to include an additional requirement for a separate evaluation to be conducted by the Secretary, three years prior to the cessation of federal funding, for each national heritage area. The evaluation would examine the accomplishments of each heritage area in meeting the goals of the management plan; analyze the leveraging and impact of investments to the heritage area; identify the critical components of the management structure and sustainability of the heritage area; and recommend what future role, if any, the National Park Service should have with respect to the heritage area.

The Department would welcome the opportunity to work with the committee to make several technical corrections to the bill relating to the Ohio and Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor, and the addition of a new section to require the completion of an evaluation by the Secretary for each of the nine national heritage areas three years before the cessation of federal funding, as described above.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members might have.